

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.”

— Audrey Hepburn

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— Colleen McSpirit-Brush, Editor

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Spotlight on Rev. Joy Martinez-Marshall

Pastor,
First Baptist Church, Ottawa, Kansas



Defying Gender Norms to Lead with Faith and Courage

Confronting gender biases and defying societal expectations, Rev. Joy Martinez-Marshall persevered in her journey to fulfill her divine calling, despite being told that church leadership was not a place for women.

Growing up, Pastor Joy experienced “a lot of different churches and church drama.” Drawn by her faith and a desire to learn more, she attended a youth camp in high school. “I’m an indoor person; I thought this would be a good idea,” she explained. “It was a horrible experience. I was very popular at school, but at camp I felt left out and awkward.”

“Yet every night my camp leader encouraged me to follow my calling,” she emphasized. “I felt God wanted me. I came home and announced I wanted to be a pastor.”

Soon after, Rev. Martinez-Marshall and her brothers began a Thursday night Bible study. Her role was to pick out the scriptures to be studied each week.

When she was 17, she told her youth pastor she was being called by God to be a missionary. “That’s nice, but we don’t let women lead in that way,” he responded. Rev. Martinez-Marshall felt rejected as she had no doubt God was calling her.

She witnessed God “in a big way” when she spent a summer in Guatemala as a missionary. “After being

told by my home church that I couldn’t be a missionary, this trip was a big part of my faith journey,” Rev. Martinez-Marshall profoundly stated. “I felt very strongly this is my calling.”

She attended college at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where she got a B.A. in Religion while deconstructing her faith completely. The process helped her heal and saved her faith. Following graduation, Rev. Martinez-Marshall attended George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco where she earned a M. Div.

Her husband, Austin, was raised in a Christian denomination where it was normal for women to preach and they supported Rev. Martinez-Marshall’s ambitions to be a pastor. In seminary she started applying for associate pastor roles throughout the South to stay near her Texas based family. But she was consistently met with resistance due to her gender. Frustrated, she went to the seminary’s Office of Ministry Connection, hoping they could help her find the post she longed for. The office connected her with Rev. Greg Mamula. He believed she would be a good fit for First Baptist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. After a rigorous interview process Rev. Joy became the first female to be named Senior Pastor at the church.

“I never wanted to be a preacher
and here I was preaching to
the entire denomination.
It was a defining moment for me.”

In addition to her regular duties as pastor of First Baptist Church Lincoln, she also served temporarily in the role of Associate Executive Minister to Ministry Development for the Nebraska Region of ABCUSA (ABC NE) and was Associate Region Minister for ABC NE. She assisted regional and camp staff in developing new ministries like the Colossians 3 Communities, which helps pastors to connect with each other and engage in candid discussions about the struggles and triumphs of ministry in a supportive environment.

Rev. Martinez-Marshall is most proud of her sibling congregations and their shared ministries. First Baptist Church Lincoln shares 1340 K Street with two other ABC NE congregations, Lincoln Karen Baptist Church and Livingstone Christian Church.

“I have a very special relationship with Rev. Marlesh Charles Mbory of Livingstone,” shared Rev.

Martinez-Marshall, who added she has served as a mentor to people going through seminary and enjoys supporting other pastors in their journey.

The three congregations have a shared ministry called, “K Street Lunch.” They distribute free lunches on Saturdays to members of the community. Anyone can stop by the church and get a free sack lunch. While Rev. Joy orders the supplies needed, a local retirement community makes the lunches, and another local business donates bottled water. “The program has been much needed due to COVID and now due to cuts in federal programs,” she explained. “People are grateful we are here.”

Rev. Joy served as vice president of the Faith Coalition of Lancaster County, Nebraska and on the Board of Directors of Baptist Women in Ministry.

She left Lincoln on June 1 to go to First Baptist Church, Ottawa, Kansas where she has been called as the new pastor.

“I appreciate Nebraska and really like both Lincoln and Omaha,” explained Rev. Martinez-Marshall. “Ottawa is right outside of Kansas City. It’s closer to my family in Texas and has the convenience of Texas type stores like Buc-ee’s gas station and Urban Value Corner Store, (a popular convenience store chain). It will be a good fit. Both my husband and I are excited.

“I have now lived in three different places I have said I would never live: Waco, Texas, Nebraska and Kansas.” Rev. Martinez-Marshall laughed. “It’s a wild ride. God is laughing. You will have to eat crow, but it will be worth it.”

“I haven’t been in a smaller community, and I am looking forward to getting to know everyone at First Baptist Ottawa,” she shared. “I want to continue to build the existing relationship with Ottawa University and get to know the students, so they can be heard and encouraged. It is important for me to give back and support young people.”

Even though Nebraska is no longer her home, those who attended the 2025 ABCUSA Biennial Summit Mission got to see Rev. Joy one last time in the state. She not only helped plan the event but was a co-chair for the local arrangements committee and helped put childcare and student programs in place as well as coordinating volunteers.

This is not the first Biennial Summit in which she has played a role. Rev. Martinez-Marshall was a speaker at the 2023 ABCUSA Biennial Summit Mission in Puerto Rico. “It was a full circle moment to be able to speak and do the work of the Holy Spirit in the story of God’s reversal,” she proudly proclaimed. “I never wanted to be a preacher and here I was preaching to the entire denomination. It was a defining moment for me.”

In Memoriam



Rev. Dr. Robert Hansen Roberts, 90, a former American Baptist leader who served in several notable roles for American Baptist Churches USA, (ABCUSA) went home to the Lord on September 5, 2024, in Orlando, Florida.

Dr. Roberts served as Interim General Secretary of ABCUSA from September 2000 to January 2002. He was associate general secretary for World Mission Support from 1990 through Jan 31, 2000. He also provided part-time consultant leadership for World Mission Support following his retirement.

In his role as associate general secretary for World Mission Support, Roberts was responsible for providing

leadership in raising approximately \$40 million annually for American Baptist missions and programs through American Baptist Mission Support. In the 1990s he led a denomination-wide tithing education campaign and authored a book on tithing, *God Wasn't Kidding*. Roberts' emphasis on tithing led to his involvement in more than 100 tithing seminars across the U.S. in 1993 and produced numerous tithing resources during his years with Mission Resource Development.

Prior to his work with World Mission Support, Dr. Roberts served from 1982-1990 as Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut. From 1979-1982 he was executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of the Central Region. Roberts' served as pastor of Braemar Baptist Church, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (1959-1962); First Baptist Church, Ridgefield Park, New Jersey (1962-1966); and Flemington Baptist Church, Flemington, New Jersey. (1966-1979).

As an active leader in the denominational emphasis on the Evangelistic Life Style in the 1970s at the national and regional levels, Roberts also chaired the American

Baptist Evangelism Team at that time. He was a well-known spokesperson for ABCUSA's "Grow by Caring" program in the 1980s.

A native of Western Canada, Roberts received a B.A. in philosophy from the University of Alberta, a B.D. in theology from McMaster Divinity School, an S.T.M. in homiletics from Union Theological Seminary (New York), and a Ph.D. in theology from New York University. His ministry continued to be vital and strong well into retirement, as he often led devotionals, hymn sings, Bible studies, and worship services at The Chapel at the Orlando Lutheran Towers, where he resided from 2008 until the time of his death.

Roberts is survived by his sisters, Meredith (Roberts) Hilsabeck (Harold); three children: Tom Roberts (Jeanine), John Roberts (Robin), and Cathy (Roberts) Goldfarb (Michael); nine grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his beloved wife of 53 years, M. Joan (Remple) Roberts, who passed away on October 8, 2010; his sister, Mildred (Roberts) McMullen (2019); and parents Thomas Elgar Roberts (2002) and Edith Amelia (Patten) Roberts (1998).

Rev. Ren Warner Reed, 89, of Coldwater, Michigan, made his transition on November 28, 2023. He was born on November 17, 1934, in Farmington, Illinois, to Cyril and Bertha (Alpaugh) Reed, the twelfth of fourteen siblings. Warner was married for 65 years to Jane Beth (Lounsberry).

Rev. Reed received a B.S. in Health Education with a minor in Social Work and Science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1957, and graduated from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois, with a M. Div. in 1960. He became an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), at the conclusion of his seminary work, at the First Baptist Church in Berwyn, Illinois. He also completed clinical psychology training at Ypsilanti State Hospital, Michigan.

Rev. Reed served as pastor to several churches including First Baptist Church, Berwyn, Illinois (assistant pastor,

1958 – 1960), South Branch Community Baptist Church and Community Baptist Church of St. Helen, Michigan (1960 - 1961), First Baptist Church, Corunna, Michigan (1961-1970), First Baptist Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin (1970 – 1973), and Clear Lake Baptist Church, Clear Lake, Indiana (1981 – 2002). In Corunna, Warner led the campaign to build a new church building and parsonage, doing a great deal of the construction and finishing the work by himself. At Clear Lake, he spent

untold hours remodeling the old church sanctuary and led a building expansion project that included a new sanctuary and fellowship hall.

Warner also worked for the State of Michigan Department of Corrections as a Parole and Probation Officer for the Branch County Circuit Court in Coldwater (1973 – 1981), and as a Probation Officer for the Branch County District Court (1981 – 1997).

Rev. Reed is survived by his wife, Jane, their son, Michael Reed, of Spring Lake, Michigan; their daughter, Joy (Jeff) Sauser, of Caro, Michigan; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents and his in-laws, Harry and Doris Lounsberry, and a son, Douglas Scott Reed.

The Rev. Dr. Trinette V. McCray, 71, entered eternal rest on May 29, 2025. A visionary leader, preacher, educator, and advocate, Dr. McCray was a trailblazer whose faithful service transformed lives and institutions across the nation.

In 1999, Dr. McCray made history as the first clergywoman elected to serve as President of American Baptist Churches USA. Her election marked a turning point in denominational leadership, breaking barriers and opening doors for future generations of women in ministry. At the time of her passing, she was serving as President of the American Baptist National Black Caucus.

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dr. McCray was a lifelong member of Calvary Baptist Church, Milwaukee. Her ministry journey began at age twenty-five, answering God's call to seminary and later being ordained by civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Ralph David



Abernathy in 1981, an accomplishment that was both spiritual and social given that Black Baptist churches in Atlanta declared their intent not to ordain women. Throughout her ministry, she championed causes of justice, equity, and spiritual formation, embodying a deep commitment to both urban ministry and Christian education.

Dr. McCray earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and a master's degree from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. She worked at Cardinal Stritch University for 23 years, where she served as a Campus Minister and the Executive Director of the Center for Calling and Engagement. She also worked at Central Baptist Theological Seminary-Wisconsin, before retirement. Her leadership extended beyond ABCUSA, included

activity with the Wisconsin Council of Churches. Through McCray Consulting, she mentored, taught, and inspired churches and faith-based organizations to embrace God's call with vitality and purpose.

Dr. McCray authored the Judson Press book *Vital Spirit, Vital Service: Spirituality that Works*, a reflection of her passion for integrating deep spirituality with impactful service.

She is preceded in death by her parents, James and Ruth McCray, and her brother, Arnold. She is survived by her sister Linda A. Brantley, nieces, nephews, extended family, and a devoted circle of friends and mentees. A Celebration of Life Service was held on June 14, 2025, at Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Celebrations

Madelyn Klose Celebrates a Century of Life and Service



On January 24, 2025, Madelyn Klose reached a remarkable milestone—her 100th birthday. This centenarian's life has been a testament to unwavering faith, dedication to family, and a heart for ministry that has touched countless lives.

She has been deeply involved in the New England American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) community. One of Madelyn's most cherished ministries is her prayer shawl ministry. Even at 100, she continues to participate actively, knitting shawls that carry her prayers and blessings to those in need. Each shawl is a labor of love, a tangible expression of her faith and compassion.

Madelyn's dedication to her family has remained steadfast. She has been a pillar of strength and love, nurturing relationships and creating a legacy of warmth and support that spans generations.

Rev. Charles and Alice Moore Celebrate Their 70th Anniversary

The Rev. Charles and Alice Moore recently celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. They were married on June 4, 1955, in Fredonia, New York.

They served together for 35 years as missionary teachers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with American Baptist International Ministries. Following their retirement, they have been active members of several congregations in New York, Virginia, Oregon and California. Charles still preaches occasionally, illustrating his sermons with African fables and experiences from his life in the Congo.

They are the parents of three sons and a daughter, who grew up in the Congo and attended The American School in Kinshasa. Charles and Alice now live with their daughter, Julia, and her husband, Tim Wyman, in Arizona.



Calling MMBB Centenarians

Do you know a current MMBB member who is celebrating a 100th birthday this year or has celebrated the century mark? We'd like to feature them in *News and Notes*. Send an email to communications@mmbb.org including their name, age, birthday and a highlight of their career or vocation.



Lifestyle

The Benefits of Laughter

Have you ever enjoyed a belly laugh so deeply that your stomach begins to tense up or your jaw begins to ache slightly? We've all had that experience. It is in those moments, when laughter takes over leaving you wiping away tears of joy and momentarily forgetting about your worries. Research shows that laughter is one of the simplest yet most powerful ways to boost your mood, reduce stress and even improve your heart health.

For most of us, the everyday stresses of life can be a strain on our overall well-being. However watching a funny social media video, your favorite comedy movie or even talking with a friend known for their humor, can not only make you feel better in the short term, but also have lasting effects. According to the *Journal of Aging*, humor has been shown to enhance lung capacity, strengthen core muscles and boost immunoglobulin A, a vital antibody that plays a key role in immune defense. After a bout of laughter, levels of the antibodies we use to fight off infections, immunoglobulin G and immunoglobulin M, continue to increase for up to 12 hours. In addition to increased lung capacity, a good laugh can play a key role in heart health by improving your circulation, lowering your blood pressure and decreasing stress hormones, which in turn help lower the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reports that one in five American adults experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression in 2022.* Participating in activities and sharing a laugh with friends is a reliable way of improving your mood and reducing stress. Laughter triggers the release of our “feel good” hormones, endorphins and serotonin, and reduces pain and stress responses while increasing the feeling of happiness and relaxation. Beyond the physical benefits, laughter also plays a crucial role in strengthening and reinforcing a sense of togetherness. Do you have an inside joke with a close friend? Sharing a laugh with your friends, family or even strangers can create a sense of belonging and connection. These interactions not only improve your mood, but also serve as a deterrent against stress, anxiety, and depression highlighting the powerful link between laughter and our mental well-being.

The next time you have a stressful day or are simply feeling down, laughter may be the remedy you need. Humor is a powerful tool that can build powerful social connections and improve our physical and mental well-being by alleviating pain and stress and enhancing our mood. By incorporating more laughter into our daily lives, we can experience these health benefits and improve our overall quality of life.

* <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr213.pdf>